



The Many Deaths Of Laila Starr by Ram V & Filipe Andrade

[Fantasy]

“Here at the end, I finally see how beautiful it all is.

“I realize I spent my whole life chasing a miracle.

“But this is it, isn't it? This is the miracle. This place, the sand, the sky, the sea beyond. No grand magic, just a quiet breath of heaven to yourself.”



The warmest of colours, a lot of lateral thinking and plenty of profound wisdom: imagine Neil Gaiman's SANDMAN, but with a mischievous sense of humour.

Immortality is about to be discovered on the streets of India, leaving the goddess of Death redundant. “In all her time she had never known the Purveyor of all Goodness to ever be the bearer of good news.” She's fired.

Now living on the streets of Mumbai as 20-something mere mortal Laila Starr, Death repeatedly tries to track down Darius, the young boy who will eventually discover the key to eternal life. She's probably not going to thank him. But people's perceptions change over time, don't they?

Nor am I being flip in my comparisons to Gaiman, in its lyricism, its wit, its spirit of place and ability to move. When Darius Shah was less than eight years old his home had a fertile garden of mango and jackfruit and sapodilla trees tended by a servant called Bardhan. Darius worshipped him. When you are young and you worship someone they appear gigantic in your eyes, and so it is that Andrade conjures a man with improbably long limbs — “tall as trees and quiet as the still summer air” – and vast, stretching arms that sweep Darius playfully up onto his shoulders. Darius couldn't understand why their gardener couldn't eat the fruit which he grew for the family. “But even at that tender age, Darius was not one for simply accepting the rules” so he snuck some back out from the kitchen.

Soon the family moved to Star Garden Heights which had much better views over everyone else but little to no garden, so Bardhan, like Death, was let go. “Don't forget me, eh, Darius?” Bardhan had said. And when Darius learns that he's died, Darius runs away to remember him properly – where we all do, at our rituals – and the funeral proves profoundly educational for Death.

Sorry, for Laila Starr. She's well and truly Laila Starr now: she's mortal – but with benefits. That bit I have to keep cryptic but each chapter does conclude with a laugh-out-loud moment. As to the lateral thinking, one of those chapters / encounters is told from the point of view of a cigarette's brief life before it's snuffed out. The irony of it all!



The resolution is a revelation, not least for Laila Starr.



My favourite series since SAGA began, in one complete volume.

Additional Resources: GRAFITY'S WALL by Ram V & Anand Radhakrishnan on the thwarting of artistic ambition. Watch out for the wall at the end of each chapter.

"Don't dream so much, it's painful to watch."

Dreams can be dashed by circumstance, happenstance or even intentional often parental intervention and these streets of Mumbai, although teeming with life, energy and colour, are far from conducive to seeing them come to fruition. They're impoverished and crowded with elements of corruption. The shanty town designated a slum is under threat of being pulled down without any regard to those who will need re-housing (so won't be), and there is pressure on the young from older generations to jettison lofty, artistic aspirations which they consider pie in the sky in favour of buckling down to work for a relative pittance. It'll bring a choke to your throat, but then make your heart soar.

